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ABSTRACT

The master of arts (M.A.) program in community psychology at Russell Sage College's two campuses in New York State is discussed. The program evolved from three interrelated developments: the growth and expansion of community psychology as a discipline, the increasing acceptance within the field of psychology of the M.A. as a terminal degree, and the increase in the number of human service agencies within the geographic locale of the college. Four goals of the program were to: reorient the student's thinking from a traditional model to a newer community-oriented model; train the student in a variety of strategies to facilitate changing behavior in community settings; train the student to evaluate the progress of social service programs; and provide the student with evaluation, assessment, and consultation skills. In addition to a core of six community courses, students can choose from among four tracks: the alcohol and drug abuse sequence, the community counseling sequence, the child care and children's services sequence, and a general sequence (for those who wish to obtain a background in psychology and are not interested in any of the specializations). Students are required to complete an externship and to design and implement a research and/or evaluation study. (SW)

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M.A. Level Training:
A Focus on Application

Patricia A. O'Connor
Russell Sage College

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Boston, March, 1985.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The M.A. in Community Psychology at Russell Sage College, located on two campuses in Albany and Troy, New York, evolved out of three approximately simultaneous and, at Russell Sage, inter-related developments: the growth and expansion of community psychology as a discipline, the increasing acceptance within the field of psychology of the M.A. as a terminal degree, and the increase in the number of human service agencies within the geographic locale of Russell Sage.

In the first, the development of community psychology has, from the beginnings at the Boston Conference (Bennett, Anderson, Cooper Hassel, Klein & Rosenblum, 1966), emphasized shifting from treatment to prevention and "innovative delivery" systems (Speilberger and Iscoe, 1970, p. 227-228; similarly Bloom, 1973 and Korman, 1973).

Second, the press for academics to move into positions more clearly grounded in the community has been on-going. The need for increasing relevance, particularly in terms of training, is clear. This, of course, raises questions regarding the appropriateness of training to meet the needs of this emerging field and of the consumers of services provided by those attaining "expert-ness" in this field. The question, then, is whether the Ph.D. is essential or, more to the point, even the appropriate degree. It is in this context that support for the legitimacy of the terminal M.A. degree

has emerged, from Newbrough (1973) and the Task Force on Master's Level Training (Newbrough, 1978). The practical acceptance is evidenced by a substantial increase in the number of M.A. programs, e.g., 200 in the 1973-1974 APA Guide (1972) and 400 in the 1983-1984 APA Guide (1982).

Third, during this same time frame (primarily the 70's), a large number of public and private community agencies (over 500) had come into existence in the region surrounding Albany, New York. New York, as a state, has a strong commitment to the provision of services to those in need (we're also famous for our high taxes to support that commitment!!) and Albany, as the capital, is the center for the State offices and numbers of private agencies. McAllister (1979), chair of the Department of Psychology at Russell Sage, discovered that many of the employees had only B.A. training and very little theoretical knowledge of the structure, organization and functioning of communities. Further, it was apparent that, although they were involved in human services, they had only minimal, if any, training in their specific work areas.

Fortuitiously, two developments at Russell Sage College (to this point, primarily an undergraduate women's institution) in the context of these led to the establishment of the M.A. program. Firstly was the decision by the College to pursue graduate education as a form of expansion. Secondly was the number of psychology faculty who found they had

developed real community interests and evolved a definite "community psychology" orientation.

As you can see, our M.A. program developed out of a clear match between the needs of the community and the interests of the faculty, in the context of a field-wide recognition of the viability of a community perspective. Specifically, the program was developed with four particular goals: Reorient the student's thinking from a traditional model to a newer community-oriented model; train the student in a variety of strategies to facilitate changing behavior in community settings; train the student to evaluate the progress of social service programs; and provide the student with evaluation, assessment and consultation skills.

The content of the program core (Table 1) is centered centered around two fundamental tasks: Organizational or community level intervention as suggested by Reiff (1968) and Goodstein and Sandler (1978) which we, more operationally, call program development, and program evaluation as suggested by Bloom (1983) and Goodstein and Sandler (1978). In the program we focus on the students' developing of characteristics such as those Silverman (1978) considers essential: Marginality, complexity, informality, and evolvement as well as the enhancement of problem-solving skills. The acquisition of these is stressed in the context

of gaining an understanding and knowledge of the content of community psychology. The underlying premise here is that the tasks of community psychologists, particularly the "front-line" M.A. level, require a creativity and flexibility that can emerge with appropriate training.

In addition to the core of six community courses, students can choose from among four tracks, depending on their area of interest: General Sequence (for those who wish to obtain a background in psychology and are not interested in any of the specializations); the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Sequence (in New York State there is an emphasis on the treatment of substance abusers, particularly alcoholism, by certified alcoholism counselors. This track qualifies students to sit for the state certification exam while giving them the advantage of receiving a Master's degree.); the Community Counseling Sequence (designed to provide further training and expertise for individuals already involved in counseling situations, e.g. working with battered women, with acting-out adolescents, etc.); or the Child Care and Children's Services Sequence (developed in conjunction with child care workers and agencies to provide training and expertise which provide a badly needed level of professionalism in this field).

Overall, the availability of the tracks permits a student to apply the community content in a particular context and gives the student additional skills with a

particular focus (except for the General Sequence). Each track, as I have already indicated, was been designed with a target population in mind and we are certainly not limiting ourselves to these areas of specialization. There is, for example, a growing campus-wide interest in gerontology.

Our approximately 75 students tend to be older (X age = 33, we usually call them "more mature"!), 70% female, employed (60% full-time, 30% part-time) mostly in human services (60%). We are primarily a part-time program, with most students taking 2 courses per semester. The five graduates (that's all we have so far) are all employed and approximately 10 are working on the required thesis. Three students have designed and implemented their own full-scale community interventions as free-standing agencies (e.g. Honor Court in Albany, an alternative to jail for alcohol-related offenses; a support and referral agency for separate, widowed or divorced persons).

As you can see, the focus is on developing students to be applied, rather than academic, in their orientation, on the assumption that much of the work to be accomplished (e.g., implementing community residence programs) requires the ability to apply theoretical models in the available political and cultural framework. The core courses, in addition to the expected content, regularly include

innovative presentations such as "design an intervention..." or "present a self-designed evaluation..." or "observe a consultation...". Students in the program evaluation course design and implement an evaluation. One year we conducted an evaluation of our own program (O'Connor, Koss and Reichert-Hunter, 1983) and another we evaluated a local hotline, at the request of the funding agency (O'Connor, Boucher, Callinan, Moon, Sheridan and Trembly, 1984).

Students are also required to complete an externship because we, as the others that you have heard here, consider the practical experience of a field placement in indirect services essential. Finally, as a culminating experience, students design and implement a research and/or evaluation study to fulfill the thesis requirement. All of these are accomplished in the context of the need to recognize and take into account the values, ethics and politics of those with whom community psychologists intend to work.

In summary, following a five year period of planning and consultation with community agencies, the psychology department offers an M.A. in Community Psychology with a core and four different sequences, designed to prepare the student with specific skills within a distinctly community oriented model. A goal-accomplishment (Williamson, Prost & George, 1978) evaluation indicates that the program generally meets the needs of the students (O'Connor et al., 1983). The

achievement of the master's level training has opened career ladder options and provided a basis for further graduate education. At the same time, the community benefits as those providing services within it become more competent without leaving either the work force or their clients.

Finally, I would like to note that it is our perception that the future of such M.A. level training will depend on two things. First is the continued interaction of the forces that led to its evolvement, that is, the interests of the College and the Psychology Department faculty and the needs of human service agencies and their employees. Secondly, it depends on the increasing acceptance by potential employers and clients (public and private sector) of the viability of the M.A. level skills. It is my view that the appropriate emphasis for community psychology as a discipline may be on M.A. level training. Community Psychologists must be, first and foremost, involved in the community, concerned with all levels of its citizens and their level of functioning, with their quality of life, both as individuals and as a community. Thus the application of community psychology or the work of community psychologists may be most appropriately implemented with M.A. level training. We can leave the life of the academic to the Ph.D.'s!

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TABLE 1

* Courses in M.A. Program
Core and Four Tracks

Community Psychology Core

Community Psychology (Select 4 courses)
Introduction to Community Psychology (R)
Community Consultation Services (R)
Community Mental Health
Community Process and Social Ecology
Intervention and Social Change

Research Methods (Select 2 courses)
Behavior Research Methods (R)
Research Methods II
Program Evaluation

Thesis (3-6 hours)

General Track

General Psychology (Select 3 courses)
Learning and Motivation (R)
Developmental Psychology
Group Dynamics
Personality Theory

Individual Psychology (Select 3 courses)
Psychological Assessment (R)
Abnormal Psychology (R)
Counseling
Behavior Modification

Externship

Community Counseling Track

Community Counseling Sequence
Counseling (R)
Group Dynamics (R)
Family Counseling (R)
Survey of Counseling Applications in the Community (R)
Practicum (R)

General Psychology
Abnormal Psychology (R)
Developmental Psychology (R)
Tests and Measurements (R)

Externship

* Alcohol and Drug Abuse Track

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Sequence
The Psychopharmacology of Drugs (R)
Problems of Dependency (R)
Counseling the Drug Abuser (R)
Group and Family Dynamics (R)

General Psychology (Select 2)
Learning and Motivation
Developmental Psychology
Personality Theory

Individual Psychology
Psychological Assessment (R)
Abnormal Psychology (R)

Internship

Child Care/Children's Services Track

Child Care/Children's Services Sequence
Developmental Psychology (R)
Sources and Outcomes of Stress in Children and Their Families I and II (R)
Intervening in Dysfunctional Systems: Working With Children and Their Families (R)

Public Administration (Select 3 courses)
Administrative Organization and Behavior
Public Service Administration and Economics
Principles of Finance and Budgeting
Formation and Administration of Human Services Policy

Externship

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